

Laffita, who is currently at Villa Marista, a state security facility and still remains detained even though her name appears on the list of prisoners scheduled to be deported from Cuba to Canada, Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, Migdelis Pozo Casanova, Esperanza Micaela Atencio de la Rosa, Daula Carpio Matas, Avianes Jordan Contreras, Mayda Barbara Jordan Contreras, Ana Maria Agramonte, Anaismiel Sanchez, Reina Isabel Rojas Sanchez, and many others.

"Currently on a hunger strike since February 24 and after being released from the hospital at Santa Clara are Lilian Meneses Martinez and Ileana Penalver Duque, both charged with illicit association and sentenced to 18 months in prison due to their participation with the opposition group that recently carried out the 120-day hunger strike in that city.

"In light of so much injustice and ignominy, we join our voices of opposition so that the world may learn of the spitefulness and indignity with which Cuban women political prisoners are treated.

"We call on all free citizens of the world to join in support of these women that suffer."

It is signed Soiris Aguiar Callejas of the Popular Democratic Alliance, Geronima Rosa Soto of the Association in Favor of Constitutional Democracy, Vicky Ruiz Labrit of the Committee of Peaceful Opposition Members and Co-ordinator of the National Centers for Studies on the Family, Celia Jorge of the Liberal Current, Maria Antonia Escobedo Yaser of the Democratic Front Oriental, Neri Gorostiza Campoalegre of the Movement Pro-Human Rights, Adis Alcolea of the Organization of Social Christians, Ana Luisa Lopez Baeza of Cuba Press, Isabel del Pino, Humanitarian Association Followers of Christ Jesus, Beatriz Garcia of the Association of the National Front Against Injustice, Dr. Iraida Leon of the Independent Medical Association, Daisy Carcases Batle of the Feminist Forum, Gladys Linares Blanco of the Humanitarian Feminist Front of Cuba, Nancy Sotolongo Leon of the Democratic Action Movement, Marta Parga of the Movement in Favor of Solidarity and Peace, Cecilia Zamora Cabrera of the Independent Feminist Organization of Cuba, Odilia Collazo Valdez of the Pro-Human Rights Party of Cuba.

Just another reality check, Mr. Speaker, with regard to the horror of Cuba today and what has been going on despite the hope that much of the world had that things could change pursuant to the Pope's visit. And things will change in Cuba.

A seed has no doubt been planted for the future of spirituality. But the reality of today is totalitarianism and continued repression. I think it is important for the international community to know the plight of Cuban human rights violations and of prisoners of conscience, especially women

prisoners of conscience that languish at this very moment in Castro's dungeons.

Mr. Speaker, March 8th is commemorated each year as international women's rights day. At this moment a great number of dignified Cuban women patriots are in dungeons of the dictatorship for the sole crime of seeking freedom for their country. Silence before their suffering is unacceptable and constitutes a form of complicity with the jailers of Cuban women prisoners of conscience. I will not cease denouncing the existence of political imprisonment in Cuba until it is but a tragic chapter of past history.

ON WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES IN CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate Women's History Month, I rise to pay tribute to the achievements of businesswomen, both in my own congressional district and across the Nation. In Montgomery County, Maryland, the district that I represent in Congress, we have one of the highest percentages of women entrepreneurs and working women in America.

The growth of women-owned businesses has been extraordinary. Women are starting businesses at twice the rate of men according to the Small Business Administration. The SBA anticipates that women will own 50 percent of the small businesses in America in the 21st century. At present, there are 9 million women-owned businesses that generate \$2.3 trillion in annual revenues, an increase of approximately 236 percent over the last 10 years.

Women business owners employ one out of every four company workers. Women-owned businesses generate more jobs than all of the Fortune 500 companies combined. According to the National Foundation for Women Business Owners, women employers are more likely to offer flexible work arrangements, child care subsidies and health care benefits.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that of the 9 million women business owners, 1.1 million are minority women entrepreneurs. Of the 1.1 million minority-owned businesses, approximately 35 percent are owned by African American women; 33 percent by Hispanic American women, and 26 percent by Asian American women. Although Native Americans represent only 1 percent of the American population, 6 percent of all women-minority-owned businesses are owned by Native American women.

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Despite all of their progress, women entrepreneurs still have difficulty obtaining access to capital. Women and minorities still only receive 5 percent of total loans for major financial institutions. Although government agencies

and corporations have initiated successful minority lending programs to compensate for these shortfalls, much still remains to be done.

On this important day, in celebration of the achievements of women in business, I am proud to join with the Business Women's Network in saluting the strong trends represented by women's organizations. Under the leadership of Edie Fraser, president of BWN, this group provides an extraordinary network, bridging together 1,200 business women's business and professional organizations.

BWN has shared some special examples of women helping women:

BWN has been working with 30 women's organizations to provide 13,000 jobs for women who have been on welfare.

Dare to Dream is a special program that provides mentors to girls in school.

The American Women's Economic Development Center, AWED, offers new women business owners one-on-one counseling with a successful entrepreneur.

The Association for Women in Science has developed a mentoring guide and programs to encourage young women to enter the fields of science, engineering and technology.

Today, more than 52 percent of all web users are women. BWN located 169 women's resource web sites last year, and that number has now increased to 750. From 169 to 750.

As we look toward the new millennium, it is clear that women will continue to be leaders in the business arena. My congratulations to the Business Women's Network and the 1,200 women's business and professional organizations for their accomplishments in promoting women-owned businesses. I salute women in business for their outstanding achievements and their contributions to the economic well-being of America.

SUNDRY MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sundry messages in writing from the President of the United States were communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

TRIBUTE TO WOMEN IN BUSINESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate Women's History Month, I rise today to pay tribute to women in business and to express pride in the fact that the women of Chicago and Cook County have benefitted from the successful programs of the Women's Business Development Center.

Based in Chicago, the Women's Business Development Center serves 2,000 women annually with counseling, training, financial assistance, certification, procurement and advocacy on

behalf of women's economic empowerment. The programs of the Chicago-based center are effective, successful, and benefit diverse women. These centers service an array of women and their families, including self-employment for former welfare recipients, business development, expansion and job creation.

The work of the Women's Business Development Center and other women's business assistance centers are essential to strengthening the economy of this Nation by fostering women's business development nationally.

The WBDC and women's business assistance centers are funded by the United States SBA office of Women's Business Ownership and by private and public sector support. They help support a diverse and growing population of new and emerging job-creating women entrepreneurs, including women transitioning off welfare.

These centers are unique in that they provide long-term training, involve public and private partnerships for their support, and can be measured on the basis of their economic impact. These centers have served tens of thousands of women.

The women's business assistance centers serve our constituencies by offering quality programs to effectively leverage scarce public and private resources into successful job creation, new business start-ups, and business expansion. Most of them, even after they are no longer eligible for Federal funding, continue to be sustained by the private sector.

These centers are committed to economic self-sufficiency programs that are as diverse as the women served: women of color, women on public assistance, women seeking self-employment, rural and urban women, and women starting home-based businesses. Therefore, it is appropriate that we pause to recognize the great work of the Women's Business Development Center and women's business assistance centers throughout the country.

I take special note of the work of Hedy Ratner of the Women's Development Center, Counselo Pope of the Cosmopolitan Chamber of Commerce, Jaribi Kitwana, director of the Women's Business Development Center, and Pam Bozeman, director of the Women's Self-Employment Project, all outstanding women in the City of Chicago who provide immeasurable help and support to other women seeking to go into business.

RECOGNIZING ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. MEEK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to welcome the United States and the Congress to Women's History Month. As a member of the Women's Caucus, I stand to rec-

ognize the achievements and the remaining obstacles of women-owned businesses.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the co-chairs of the Women's Caucus and the women-owned business legislative team, my colleagues, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. JUANITA MILLENDER-MCDONALD) and the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. SUE KELLY), for organizing us to come to the floor today. They should be congratulated for their efforts on this issue, specifically for introducing legislation, House Resolution 313, which outlines the findings from last year's first-ever Women's Caucus hearing on women-owned businesses.

This legislation expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that all Federal agencies would benefit from reviewing specified recommendations for the purpose of improving equitable access for women-owned businesses to the Federal procurement market.

Women-owned businesses are important sources of economic development in my community in Miami, Florida, one of the poorest districts in the country. But low income does not mean low ambition, Mr. Speaker, nor does it mean low potential. Microcredit programs that lend small amounts to non-traditional borrowers have proven to be very promising tools for change, allowing women to build businesses, income and pride for themselves and their families.

Small loans, yes; microcredit, yes; but it does bring respect and ownership to these women who otherwise could not find work. This in itself is another remedy for getting off welfare and moving into work.

The microcredit concept has been notably developed by Working Capital Florida. That is the name of the group. It is a local nonprofit group in south Florida. This program serves approximately 350 businesses in Miami, Dade County. The loans average about \$725, and they have to be paid back in less than a year. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? These loans have been coming back in and being paid and being rotated and other women are taking advantage of this money.

Many of the borrowers of the money comprise single-family mothers with not a man in the House. These are minority mothers who have children they must care for, and certainly Working Capital Florida is helping them.

Programs like Working Capital Florida provide women with the opportunity to develop their entrepreneurial talents. Working Capital Florida provides the loans necessary to launch businesses, and also provides education about business practices through workshops and training sessions, allowing women to further tune their skills for successful enterprises.

In the wake of welfare reform, this is a particularly critical time for business enterprise, and specifically business enterprise for women. There are

few jobs for female welfare recipients in inner-city areas. In Miami many women have taken the giant step of employing themselves to make ends meet for their families.

In Liberty City, my own neighborhood in Miami, many women create their own private businesses. Many of them make dolls. They sell them. They make head scarves. They make ethnic clothing. They capitalize on their own personal talents in order to make ends meet. Innovative businesses run the gamut from day care and house cleaning to hair braiding and stick-on nail specialists.

These women simply could not launch these businesses without the required financial backing to bring their initiatives to fruition. Programs like Working Capital Florida enable these women to devise their own business plans and get on their feet. These are small loans, Mr. Speaker, between \$500 and \$5,000, and they maintain the ability to produce significant life changes. They generate economic activity in our communities and a sense of self-pride.

I believe that the community development opportunity that is provided through group lending programs is vitally important, especially during a time that long-time safety nets for the poor are unraveling. Further support from other private sources, commercial banks, and State and Federal governments, helps to further build programs like Working Capital Florida.

Mr. Speaker, thousands of poor women are responsive, creative and hard-working. They have to spark. All they need is a little leadership to turn that spark into a flame. And that is what Working Capital Florida is doing and that is what many programs throughout this country are doing to help women get on their feet. They have the skills. They have the ability.

U.S. OBSESSION WITH WORLDWIDE MILITARY OCCUPATION POLICY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, last week it was Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis. This week's Hitler is Slobodon Milosevic and the Serbs. Next week, who knows? Kim Chong-il and the North Koreans? Next year, who will it be, the Ayatollah and the Iranians? Every week we must find a foreign infidel to slay; and, of course, keep the military-industrial complex humming.

Once our ally, Saddam Hussein, with encouragement from us, invaded Iran. Was it not logical that he might believe that we condone border crossings and invasions even into what Iraqis believe rightfully theirs, Kuwait, especially after getting tacit approval from U.S. Ambassador Glaspie?

Last week U.S. Special Envoy to the Balkans Robert Gelbard, while visiting Belgrade, praised Milosevic for his cooperation in Bosnia and called the separatists in Kosova "without question a